

The 25-Year Period Of Extremes— Nothing Was Just Average

War boom times, depression and flood all were record breakers

THE 1913-1938 quarter-century came on the scene with Louisville adjusting to its new-found necessity, electricity, and also learning to live with still other changes.

Women were operating automobiles and even demanding the right to vote. New-style telephones were replacing the ring-for-central types. Motion pictures were the rage of the day.

And world war—the war to end all wars they would call it—lay just over the horizon.

The period starting with the merger of all gas and electric companies in Louisville would be one of great extremes; nothing would be merely average. Things would either be the “greatest” or the “worst.”

For this was the 25 years when a generation of Louisvillians were born during a worldwide war which was the worst in history, when they started to grade school during a boom time when prosperity was the greatest in history, and when they entered college with their city wallowing in a depression which was both the worst and greatest in history.

Then for good (or bad) measure they would

be called upon to survive a time when flood water on the Ohio rose higher, covered more of the city and caused more damage than ever before.

But Louisville rolled with the punches, learning valuable lessons from its bad as well as its good times. Because it had been realistic in viewing its shortcomings and never had become complacent, Louisville survived the long, lean depression years in better fashion than did most industrial cities.

In a manner of speaking, Louisville had a preview of the depression 15 years before it actually struck, and steps taken then appreciably eased the effects of the big, stem-winding, record-breaking financial paralysis that officially began on an October day in 1929 that now is known as “Black Monday.”

Louisville's sneak preview of the depression came in the 1914-1917 period. War, started when Austria invaded tiny Serbia on June 28, 1914, already was raging across most of Europe, and threatening to spread.

Of more immediate concern to Louisville,

however, since there were those who vowed America never would become involved in Europe's troubles, was a fast-developing sentiment in this country to outlaw the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages, an eventuality that would strike the city squarely in the pocketbook.

The Louisville of that day had, in large measure, put all its economic eggs in one basket. That is, instead of diversifying, the city's commerce had centered more and more on tobacco and distilling, businesses in which it led the entire world.

With the approach of national prohibition, it was clear that the 35 distilleries in Louisville and environs would be closed, throwing thousands of production, retail, wholesale and distribution workers out of employment.

It was then that Louisville took an agonizing look at the realities of its situation, and long-range, remedial steps were taken.

In 1916, citizens of the city subscribed more than \$1,000,000 toward establishment of an Industrial Foundation which was created as



AT LONG LAST THE OHIO'S FALLS WAS HARNESSSED

During the 1913-1938 period, a hydroelectric dam at the falls put the energy of the river to work in producing power for the city. Also in this period, the Louisville Gas and Electric Company increased the capacity of its Waterside Station and built the Beargrass gas facility.